

Message Text

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PAGE 01 COLOMB 02209 280321Z
ACTION NEA-10

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, ENRG, PINS, ELAB, CE

SUBJ: ELECTRICITY RESTORED AS POWER STRIKE ENDS

REF: COLOMBO 2200

1. SUMMARY. STRIKING ELECTRICITY BOARD EMPLOYEES RETURNED TO WORK AT 10 A.M. LOCAL TIME MONDAY, JUNE 27, AND POWER WAS QUICKLY RESTORED WITHIN THE NEXT FEW HOURS, APPARENTLY THROUGHOUT THE ISLAND. TRADE UNIONS HAVE BEEN PROMISED AN INVESTIGATION OF THE OPERATIONS OF THE BOARD BUT WERE NOT GRANTED THEIR PRIMARY DEMAND, REINSTATEMENT OF THE FIRED BOARD CHAIRMAN. END SUMMARY.

2. THE STRIKE AT THE CEYLON ELECTRICITY BOARD ENDED AT 10 A.M. MONDAY, JUNE 27. POWER WAS RESTORED TO MOST OF COLOMBO ALMOST IMMEDIATELY AND TO ALL OTHER TOWNS WE WERE ABLE TO CONTACT BY THE AFTERNOON. THERE WAS APPARENTLY NO PERMANENT DAMAGE DONE TO THE ELECTRICAL GENERATORS OR TRANSMISSION EQUIPMENT.

3. THE STAGE WAS SENT FOR A SETTLEMENT DURING A SUNDAY EVENING MEETING BETWEEN STRIKERS AND MINISTER MAITHRIPALA SENANAYAKE.
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AYAKE, WHO HAD BROKEN OFF HIS ELECTIONEERING TO RETURN TO COLOMBO. ALTHOUGH SENANAYAKE WAS SAID TO BE ADAMANT ABOUT THE FIRING OF ELECTRICITY BOARD CHAIRMAN D.P. CHANDRASINGHE, HE APPARENTLY AGREED TO OTHER DEMANDS INCLUDING THE ASSURANCES OF THE APPOINTMENT OF A QUALIFIED ENGINEER (RATHER THAN THE APPOINTMENT OF A QUALIFIED ENGINEER (RATHER THAN A CIVIL SERVANT) AS THE NEW CHAIRMAN. HE ALSO PROMISED TO LOOK INTO

ALLEGED MALPRACTICES AT THE ELECTRICITY BOARD AND ASSURED STRIKERS THAT THEY WOULD NOT BE PUNISHED FOR THEIR ACTIONS OVER THE WEEKEND.

4. COMMENT: NOW THAT THIS LIGHTNING STRIKE IS OVER, ONE ASPECT THAT STANDS OUT IS THE TOTAL INABILITY OF THE GOVERNMENT AND PARTICULARLY THE NAVY TO PREVENT THE BLACKOUT DESPITE MORE THAN ADEQUATE FOREWARNING. THE EMPLOYEES MISCHIEVOUSLY FLICKED THE CURRENT ON AND OFF WEDNESDAY NIGHT, STRUCK AT THE HEAD OFFICE THURSDAY, AND TEMPORARILY PUT TWO COLOMBO SUB-STATIONS OUT OF COMMISSION FRIDAY NIGHT. THE NAVY, WHICH IS GIVEN RESPONSIBILITY FOR MAINTAINING POWER SERVICES IN ANY EMERGENCY, QUICKLY POSTED MEN AT THOSE SUBSTATIONS AND ANNOUNCED THEIR INTENTION TO GUARD THE KEY HYDROELECTRIC GENERATING STATIONS. EITHER THEY DIDN'T GET THERE EARLY ENOUGH OR CONFINED THEMSELVES TO GUARDING THE PERIMETERS OF THE AREA. SATURDAY NIGHT THE SABOTAGE OF THE GRID TOOK PLACE EASILY AND WITHOUT ANY CLASH WITH THE NAVY GUARDS.

5. ON THE POSITIVE SIDE WAS THE APPARENT ABSENCE OF ANY MAJOR PROBLEMS OF PUBLIC ORDER. ALTHOUGH WE HAVE HEARD LITTLE FROM THE PROVINCES, COLOMBO REMAINED CALM UNDER INCREASED POLICE PATROLS. IN A COUNTRY LESS DEPENDENT UPON ELECTRIC POWER THAN THE U.S., A BLACKOUT PROVED TO BE AN INCONVENIENCE BUT CAUSED LITTLE REAL HARDSHIP. EVEN THE TRAINS KEPT RUNNING, SOMETHING UNUSUAL IN ITSELF DURING THE PAST STRIKE-PLAUGED WEEKS. LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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END COMMENT.
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Message Attributes

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